Dissertation Proposal

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"Intra-Organizational Mobility: Movers, Incumbents, and Communication Networks"

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The purpose of this dissertation is to develop a theory on intra-organizational mobility that accounts for the social network dynamics resulting from career changes. As individuals move from position to position through their careers within an organization, they tend to experience a change in the level of status associated with the job, in the tasks performed, in the level of responsibilities undertaking, in the organizational context wherein the work is carried out, or some combination of the above. The change in career leads to changes in the structures of organizational social networks, which in turn, could affect all employees embedded in the network. In this regard, intra-organizational mobility is important to both the movers and the incumbents as their career processes unfold. In the rest of this dissertation, I separately examine the effect of intra-organizational mobility on the workplace experience of the movers themselves and the incumbent group members' outcomes.

In Chapter 1, I set out to explore the impact of internal mobility on movers who change groups within an organization. I first argue mobility would lead to a short-term work disruption for the movers. I proceed to explore the conditions under which work disruption resulting from intra-organizational mobility can be mitigated. Prior work on hiring has highlighted that establishing social relations with target organizations can increase the number of ties that new group members form after they join, which in turn, can lead to positive performance outcomes. Continuing in this vein, I argue that pre-move communication ties with the group that movers are joining can benefit the movers and help them maintain their previous level of performance. Further, I posit that the benefits movers can gain from their pre-move communication contacts are contingent on the network characteristics of the pre-move contacts.

In Chapter 2, I examine how the introduction of a high-performance employee affects the performance of incumbent group members. I argue that the introduction of a high-performance employee on average increases incumbents' performance. The positive effect, however, is not evenly distributed among group incumbents. Rather, it depends on the incumbent members' response to unfavorable social comparison. Particularly, I propose that low-performance incumbents in groups with stable performance-ranking hierarchy are likely to experience negative outcomes such as negative emotions or low effort provision, which subsequently would decrease their own performance, and increase the group's performance disparity. By contrast, low-performance incumbents in groups wherein social learning occurs are likely to catch up with their peers, which subsequently would decrease group performance disparity.

In Chapter 3, I investigate the effect of gender on the persistence of movers' communication networks. The persistent communication ties, because they oftentimes coincide with easy communication and high trust, tend to increase employees' job performance. Building on prior work investigating gender differences in social networks, I argue that women are more likely to maintain persistent communication contacts whereas men are more likely to establish new communication contacts when they move within an organization. I proceed to explore its performance implication and expect that women tend to suffer less job disruption arising from internal mobility than men because of their higher likelihood to persist communication ties.